DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 402 680 EA 028 146

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TITLE Leadership for Minority Achievement: How Schools Promote or Prevent Quality Education.
PUB DATE Mar 96
NOTE 25p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development (51st, New Orleans, LA, March 16-19, 1996).
PUB TYPE Viewpoints (Opinion/Position Papers, Essays, etc.) (120) -- Information Analyses (070) -- Speeches/Conference Papers (150)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Academic Achievement; Collegiality; *Cultural Pluralism; Educational Environment; Educational Quality; High Schools; *Leadership; Organizational Climate; *Participative Decision Making; Politics of Education; *Power Structure; *Teacher Empowerment

ABSTRACT

Today's schools are being affected by changes in educational technology and increasing student diversity. In the new education paradigm, schools must prepare all students to think critically, solve problems quickly, and learn continuously. Schools therefore need leaders who can mobilize entire communities to accept and lead change. This paper describes how power relations in schools can limit or enhance student success and teacher growth. The discussion is based on data from a single interview with a female high school English teacher at a large high school in an ethnically diverse school system. The teacher describes how a school project designed to promote shared decision making through teacher involvement led to a lack of trust, increased staff turnover, shut out teachers perceived as trouble makers, and stymied risk taking. The paper argues that principals are the key to empowered schools and that they must be provided with professional development in order to understand empowerment from different perspectives. One way to begin to understand cultural differences is to debunk the following cultural myths: (1) that racial/ethnic differences will be dissolved in the "melting pot"; (2) that equal treatment is equitable; (3) that perceptions of what constitutes effective communication are universal; and (4) that all stereotypes are negative. (Contains 15 references.) (LMI)

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ED 402 680

Leadership For Minority Achievement:

How Schools Promote Or Prevent Quality Education

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Department of Defense Education Activity

Running head: LEADERSHIP FOR MINORITY ACHIEVEMENT

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Leadership For Minority Achievement:

How Schools Promote Or Prevent Quality Education

Can schools change society or are they merely a reflection of our society? Can America still offer the "dream" or are we dreaming? What will it take for schools to promote quality education for everyone?

This paper begins to answer some of these questions. This paper is a call for new schools and for new leaders. This paper embodies the voice of one teacher "crying out in the wilderness." This paper is a reminder of how the imbalance of power can prevent quality education.

Recent changes, brought about by technological advances, population explosion and national and international affairs, to name a few, have transformed societal expectations for school graduates. Whereas, in the past, a strong back and a willingness to work was all that was needed to earn decent wages, today, these characteristics can offer only an empty promise of an "American Dream." Today's society requires, among other things, school graduates who can think critically, problem solve quickly, and learn continuously.

NEW TIMES DEMAND NEW SCHOOLS

The old basics of reading, writing and arithmetic must now serve as the foundation for the new basics of critical thinking, problem solving and

continuous learning. And, these new basics must be provided to everyone. Further, since the "minority" population in the US is quickly becoming the majority, society must ensure that this new "mainstream" is well equipped to shoulder the burden of productivity. This productivity can be achieved only when every student masters the new "basic" skills. Therefore, society can ill afford to perpetuate and accept the paradigm of winners and losers, of have's and have not's.

The former paradigm, where young people were sorted by color, ethnicity, and or perceived cognitive ability, must give way to a new paradigm, where all young people are seen as capable; where all young people are held to rigorous, challenging standards; and where all young people are expected to succeed at high levels. In the former paradigm, the purpose of schools was to maintain the stratification by SES, class, and education. In the new paradigm, schools prepare every student to be all that they can be. However, these new schools can be created only by leaders who mobilize entire communities to accept change, indeed to lead change.

NEW SCHOOLS REQUIRE NEW LEADERS

Many of today's school based leaders grew up in the traditional school were leading was synonymous with bossing, mandating,

intimidating. Those who broke ranks with leadership through intimidation were thought of as soft and ineffective but have now become society's new heroes (and "sheroes"). The traditional paradigm of leadership by mandate has been replaced by a new paradigm of leadership through empowerment.

A VOICE IN THE WILDERNESS

Using a case study, I describe how power relations in schools can limit or enhance student success and teacher growth. This paper is based on a single semi-structured interview lasting over 75 minutes. While the interview was based on 40 open-ended questions related to issues of power, I asked only 1 or 2 questions to Nancy, a high school English teacher who I have known for 5 years.

Nancy Robins (not her real name) has been teaching English for over 15 years at a the National High School in Sub/Urban County Public Schools. NHS is a large high school with over 2,000 students representing over 60 countries. Over half of the student population at the school is Hispanic while 65% of the school system is African American. Thus, the system's resources and the schools' resources most often target African American students.

A project at the NHS was designed to promote shared decision-making through teacher involvement. According to Nancy, teachers were excited about the project but quickly became disillusioned with it. The project promoted power-sharing by the principal. Nancy stated that this scared the hell out of our principal. Finally, the project was implemented at NHS because of the school's ethnic diversity. Yet, it seemed to have negative consequences for the Hispanic students.

Nancy said, "the more I learned about the project and met people through all the meetings held, the more I thought, if anybody is interested in being 'successful' and moving up the 'hierarchy,' this project is the way to do it. This is the place to be." The project offered unparalleled opportunities to meet "important" people.

Negative Effects Of The Project

The project engendered a lack of trust. Whereas at the beginning of the project, teachers got involved because they wanted to make things better for students and the school, a year later it seemed that people were getting involved out of a desire for power. At the beginning of the project, Nancy would not have questioned people's motives for getting involved, later she questioned their sincerity.

The project increased staff turnover. The principal was asked to give away power but if things didn't turn out well, he was on the line. Nancy doesn't blame the principal for being resistant to the project. After suffering a heart attack, the principal retired and is now an assistant superintendent in a neighboring district. Additionally, the area superintendent's sudden resignation sent a shock through the school system. She was very involved in the project, sat on the steering committee, and seemed to have a lot to gain from the project. Her resignation sent a very strong and clear message that the project had backsliden and had lost momentum. Another area of turnover was among the teachers. This year the school hired 40 new teachers, that's 1/3 of a faculty of 130. Many teachers left because of their disappointment with the project. In 5 years at NHS, Nancy had never seen such high turnover.

The project reinforced the idea that "good ol' boys stick together." The new principal had been an assistant at the high school for years. Three to six months before the former principal's retirement, he had been assigned to a junior high school. It just so happens that that junior high also housed our area superintendent's offices. Moreover, the assistant principal's wife worked as site coordinator for the project in the area superintendent's office. Nancy said, "come'on, you don't have to be

stupid and close your eyes to know what's going on." While the school called for nominations for the selection committee and some new teachers were involved in the committee, there were some "good ol' boys involved, too." Even thought the assistant principal wasn't an experienced principal, he was offered the principalship at NHS. Nancy went on to say that "it turned out that when he was hired this year, the 2 people who were on the selection committee were given gravy train types positions. It's like perpetuating the same old same old. Again is like you have to close your eyes and pretend if you want to fit in."

The project stymied risk taking. Nancy didn't realize that her speaking up would entail so many risks until later in the year. By speaking up about different issues, challenging courses of actions, and, in effect, serving as the conscience for the group, Nancy took risks that would have severe repercussions. For example, Nancy said that she became disillusioned with the project when it appeared that non-black minorities were getting a fairer shake under the former principal than they were under the new project. This was perplexing because even thought the former principal was one of the best principals Nancy had ever worked for, he was not an advocate for Hispanic students. Nancy felt that this project was all about politics and getting more money primarily for Black

students. Nancy said this to the steering committee. "I told them that they weren't really serving the school community since Hispanics represented more than half of the non-black minorities (42 % of non-black minorities)," Nancy said. The steering committee was not interested in Nancy's comments and subtlety let her know.

Nancy's risk taking resulted in her being shut out. "I was being ousted," Nancy said. Opportunities came and went and Nancy didn't know about them. There were opportunities that Nancy didn't know about because, as she put it, she became part of the woodwork. It hurt her emotionally to be in "the dog house."

The project reinforced power imbalances at National High School. Nancy got into a personality conflict with a person who was pretty involved in a personal way with people in power with the project. Nancy was told to just let it go and don't do anything. She was told not to make any waves. But she did make a lot of waves from the principal to the board of education. This was going to become a legal issue because Nancy felt that there were a lot of opportunities that were not given to me that should have been given to me.

The reason that Nancy was not given these opportunities was because of the conflict and the fact that, according to Nancy, "this person

that I was having my conflict with was going to bed with one of these people who was in charge of the project." This led to them giving Nancy a verbal reprimand. Nancy was told to shut up and not say anything else about this issue.

Nancy got her brother, a lawyer, to take the next step-- a legal recourse. But then, Nancy had an accident. In the middle of this horrible situation at school, Nancy said, "--it changed my whole opinion about whether I want to go back. I don't care to go back because it hurt. As far as I'm concerned, if you don't have collegiality, you can't give this 100%. And up to that point I was giving it 100%. This thing created a lot of tension and dissipated my trust in the school." Once the accident happened, priorities changed. Nancy realized how much of a real up hill struggle it would be to keep her mouth shut. "The fact that an accident made me more empowered is pathetic," said Nancy.

POWER IN SCHOOLS

Totalitarian schools do not have a place for revolutionaries. Nancy's experience of being 'shut out' and 'ostracized' is shared by other teachers who speak out against authorities in their schools. McNeil (cited in Blase, 1991) stated that "schools are more about control than they are about education" (p. 136). Blase (1991) summarized what Nancy

experienced when he stated that, "Most teachers... know the feeling of being labeled and marginalized if they are too outspoken. They know the feelings of being locked out of the centers of powers where important information is shared. They have felt the risks of collective action even on a small scale. They know the subtle and not-so-subtle ways teachers are silenced" (p. 136). Schools do not often look kindly upon dissenters.

Power constrains or liberates (Corbett, 1991). Muth (cited in Maerof, 1988), Marshal and Scribner (1991), and Blase (1991) define power as influence. Power is the ability to carry out a task and manage conflicts. Blase noted that teachers often use power to protect themselves from administrative demands. Viewed from this perspective, teachers exercise their power and influence by either sharing or withholding information.

The source of power depends on ones' status (Bloome and Willett, 1991). Authorities, who have position power, often view power as a zero sum gain where power is perceived as limited. Bloome and Willett argue that "power over" is being challenged by feminist thought and theory by the idea of "power with." According to feminist theory, we can satisfy our desires without imposing our wills on others. We can have power with rather than power over. Power with assumes that relationships of

cooperation, mutual support, and equity can exist without conflict or domination.

POWER TO TEACHERS

Whether seen as power over or power with, There is little doubt that teachers have infinitesimal power in school organizations. How much influence in decision making do teachers have? Do they have a say about grading policies, discipline, or curriculum? Because teachers often close their door and perform their professional activities without supervision, some argue that teachers actually have much power. For example, while many teachers use the curriculum developed centrally, others ignore it.

Questions about teacher power led Maerof (1988) to define power as professionalism. Maerof argued that if teaching were a profession, teachers would have more power. To gain power, teachers need to boost their status, increase their knowledge about content and methods, and gain access to decision-makers. Coincidentally, the Holmes group stated that competent teaching was the result of three elements: a) subject matter knowledge, b) systematic knowledge of teaching, and c) reflective practical experience. Thus, teacher power can be seen as teacher professionalism.

POWER TO STUDENTS

Whether it is administrators and teachers, teachers and students, parents and children, or front line workers and customers, people treat others as they are treated. Teachers treat students as they are treated. Maerof (1991) said, that "paradoxically, empowerment of teachers remains linked to empowerment of students" (p. 57). After describing how teachers were marginalized and labeled when they challenge the power of those in authority, Blase 91991) stated that , "ironically, many teachers end up using these very strategies on students in their classrooms" (p. 136). Sarason (1991) stated that students just as teachers are very sensitive to issues of power and control in the classroom. According to Sarason, "teachers regard students the way their superior regard them--that is, as incapable of dealing responsibly with issues of power, even on the level of discussion" (p. 83). Finally, Shedd and Bacharach (1991) concluded that, "how administrators treat teachers and how teachers treat other teachers (in their departments) and how teachers treat students become intertwined." (p. 191).

EMPOWERMENT: A NEW AGE

Power struggles are no less real in the business world. Empowerment encourages initiative and responsibility but organizations

often discourage both (Pinchot, 1993). Access to accurate information is necessary for empowerment to occur. Yet, neither teachers in schools nor front line workers in business organizations have access to full information.

Those who propose empowerment by asking followers to take more risks and initiatives are asking them to break the rules created and enforced by administrators themselves (Block, 1993). In other words, high control engenders low risk. Block suggested that participation becomes manipulation and a means of persuading people to adapt to their own helplessness when we do not shift power relations in organizations.

Finally, Block's descriptions of business decentralization rings true with many teachers and administrators implementing site based management. Block stated that decentralization usually means that instead of one person at the top making decisions, 7 or 8 people run 7 or 8 decentralized regions. Furthermore, discussions on decentralization continue to focus on how people at the lower level of the bureaucracy can work with less supervision. For example, in many large city school districts, some schools have 50 teachers reporting to 1 principal, 30 principals reporting to 1 area superintendent, 6 area superintendents

reporting to one deputy whore reported to a superintendent. Of course, the superintendent often reports to 8 board members. The span of control at the lower level was 1:50, while at the higher levels it was 8:1, 1:1, 1:6. Thus, the is why did people at the top require more supervision than those at the bottom?

THE KEY TO EMPOWERED SCHOOLS

Principals are *the* key to developing empowered schools. Professional development addressed to principals can provide better results than that addressed to teachers only. Principals need to learn how to let go in order to promote risk taking, creativity, and professionalism among their teachers.

There is no doubt that reforming schools through empowerment is an idea whose time has come (and is almost gone). Carl Glickman (1990) stated that, "the movement to improve schools through empowerment may be the last chance in many of our lifetimes to make schools institutions that are worthy of public confidence and professional respect" (p. 69). The irony according to Glickman is that the more an empowered school works collectively, the more individual differences and tensions among the staff become obvious.

Large school systems (and small ones) are among the last bastions of dictatorships according to Gifford and Elizabeth Pinchot (1993). The metaphor of "principal as leader" has been broadened to include "the principal as dictator." According to the Pinchots, work life in bureaucratic organizations resembles life in a totalitarian. The Wall dividing East and West has collapsed but the wall dividing teachers from administrators, students from teachers, and parents from school authorities seems high, monumental, overwhelming.

Leadership through empowerment means that teachers' commitment, motivation and passion come are assumed rather than negotiated. Empowering administrators create school environments where teachers' curiosity to learn is released rather than coerced. According to Senge, "the organizations that will truly excel in the future will be the organizations that discover how to tap people's commitment and capacity to learn at *all* levels in an organization" (Senge, 1990, p. 4). Business organizations are discovering that continuous learning can keep them in business. This lesson needs to be learned by schools, too! According to Arie De Geus of Royal Dutch/Shell (cited in Senge, 1990) "the rate at which organizations learn may become the only sustainable

source of competitive advantage" (p. 349). Couldn't this be said of schools as well?

It is ironic that educational organizations, who supposedly are committed to spreading learning, are *discovering* organizational learning. Education leaders have a moral responsibility to ensure learning on the part of all of its stakeholders not just its students.

School-based leaders and superintendents play key roles in designing the new schools and organizations we want. If they are to perform their new roles effectively, and, if they are to be expected to implement a new mission, then, they must be provided with the knowledge and skills, the tools if you will, to fulfill their new roles. Developing leaders who continually create and produce a desired future, a new organizational culture, philosophy, and vision, while promoting an understanding of and a commitment to effective leadership principles and practices, will require new aspects of professional development.

PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT FOR EMPOWERED SCHOOLS

There is little doubt that we must provide professional development to school leaders to help them develop empowered schools. John Kotter states that watching people empowering others makes one wonder if they didn't get a degree in disempowerment (Kotter, 1996). Some of the tell-

tale signs of a person with a DD (Doctorate in Disempowerment) degree include how they handle disagreements; their ability or lack of ability to "read" people (non-verbals); their vocabulary (i.e., "tried that before," "my way or highway," "do it this way"); their view of information (i.e., protectors or disbursers); and, their supervisory style (i.e., cattle herders or shepherds).

Several trends effecting leadership development need to inform design decisions as we provide professional development for empowered schools. First, leadership development programs need to stop the practice of "doing it to them," and begin the practice of "doing it with them" (Olshfiski and Curchin, 1993). This means that participants of development programs must be viewed as collaborators and co-designers not merely, passive recipients of training programs. Second, leadership development programs must emphasize results, and emphasize implementing the organization's strategy and goals (Olshfiski and Curchin, 1993). In other words, development programs must be evaluated on the basis of changed behavior at the job-site, and must be driven by the system's strategic plan and benchmarks. In the context of the strategic plan, decisions on process and content must be based on a collaborative process with participants.

However, professional development for empowerment can be a double edge sword. On the one hand it can "empower" (e.g., "you're important to the change process," "we need your help"). On the other hand, it can "disempower/disable" by communicating that people don't know enough, and therefore, must get "trained."

Moreover, we must be mindful that with empowerment, tensions become visible. Increased genuine involvement often results in increased genuine polarization. Therefore, tolerance for ambiguity must be one of the important skills required of empowering leaders.

One key to meeting these new demands is for school leaders to truly understand empowerment from different perspectives. We need to challenge our assumptions of empowerment. Recognizing cultural influences, administrators must avoid the traps of broadly stereotyping people into narrow, fixed categories. One way to begin to understand cultural differences is to debunk the cultural myths many of us may still believe. Today's teachers and administrators must think beyond the deeply ingrained *myths* in American culture. The following 5 myths can serve as a starting point in considering how culture can have an impact on our consideration of empowerment efforts(Torres, 1995).

1. The myth of the melting pot. While some in America still believe that America is the great melting pot where people's background and cultures melt in some kind of metaphysical giant cauldron, most thinking people would agree that not everyone has "melted". The theory of the melting pot has been more accurately coined as the "cookie-cutter" theory, by Gary Weaver (cited in Torres, 1995), for by this theory America attempts to have diverse people of the conform to one model of behaving (e.g., assertive, direct, "honest").
2. The myth of the Golden Rule. While few would argue that the precept of the Golden Rule is flawed, our multicultural society requires that we reconsider "doing unto others as you would have others to unto you" in order to "do unto others as they would like to be done unto." We run the risk of treating others the same, when what we want, presumably, is to treat them equitably. Equal treatment is not equitable. The long lines at women's rest rooms at conferences, meetings, and major events provide ample evidence that equal treatment is not equitable.
3. The it's-a-matter-of-communication myth. It's important to address how we communicate because our perceptions of effective communication may betray our deep-seated ethnocentrism. For example, do effective communicators maintain eye contact or do they

close their eyes while someone else is speaking so that they can concentrate more effectively on the speaker's words? Does "yes" mean "yes" or does it mean "maybe" or even "no" sometimes?

4. The myth that we're not really different. The myth of the melting pot assumes that differences can melt away. The myth that we're not really all that difference assumes that differences ought to be ignored, or at best considered irrelevant.
5. They myth that all stereotypes are bad. Often, people are reluctant to consider culture because of the myth that all stereotyping is harmful. Stereotypes can help or hurt depending on how we use them.

When considering empowerment, it is critical that we evaluate how culture may affect our view of empowerment. These 5 myths suggest that our diversity may pose challenges to explaining an abstract, perhaps, culturally bound concept such as empowerment.

CONCLUSION

The reform movements of the 1980's and 1990's have not addressed the wall separating the powerless from the powerful to any significant degree. Since the publication of A Nation At Risk, reform efforts focused on changing inputs--better, more demanding curriculum, more stringent graduation requirements, higher college entrance

requirements. Following A Nation At Risk, the Homes Group and the Carnegie Report on Teaching sought to reform schools by attracting better people into the profession through a series of magnets--higher salaries and the promise of professionalization. Finally, the restructuring movement, the culmination of the reform movement to date, highlighted the need to bring decision making to the local school, called for changes in the roles professional in the schools play, and attempted to raise academic expectations by establishing and adopting higher content, and performance standards for ALL students. Theoretically, the restructuring movement addressed the "role, rules, and relationships" in schools. Practically, however, the movement fell short of significantly the power struggles found in schools. Rather than having one central office making decisions for 20 to 30 schools, many districts now have 20 to 30 schools making decision for their individual schools without significant participation from either school personnel or the school communities they purport to serve.

This paper was a call for new schools and for new leaders. It represented the power struggles experienced by a high school teacher in a suburban county public school as a "voice crying out in the wilderness." This paper was a reminder to us of how the imbalance of power can

prevent quality education. Finally in this paper, I argue that empowered schools require empowering professional development.

While reformers acknowledge the possible problems that power relationships cause, few prescribe plausible solutions to these power struggles. As Paulo Freire (Shor and Freire, 1987) stated, "throughout education we can first understand power in society, we can throw light on the power relations made opaque by the dominant class" (p. 31-32).

Schools can change society. Schools do not have to be merely reflections of it. America can still offer the "American Dream." It will take all of us to ensure that schools promote the kind of quality education required to make that dream a reality for each of our students.

DISCLAIMER: The opinions expressed herein are those of the author and in no way represent any official position of any agency of the U.S. Government.

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